



U. S. Department of Justice
United States Attorney
Eastern District of Washington

PRESS RELEASE

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“TWO GUILTY OF KILLING AND SELLING BALD AND GOLDEN EAGLES”

Yakima – Today, James A. McDevitt, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Washington, announced that Alfred L. Hawk Jr., age 23, and William R. Wahsise, age 23, both of White Swan, Washington, pleaded guilty to killing bald eagles and conspiring to take and sell bald and golden eagle parts in violation of federal law. A sentencing hearing is set for October 13, 2010.

According to court documents, Alfred L. Hawk, Jr. and William R. Wahsise, both Yakama tribal members, hunted and killed eagles by baiting them with wild horses that were killed to attract the eagles. In March 2009, wildlife agents seized 21 golden eagle tails, 30 golden eagle wings, 31 bald eagle tails, two bald eagle wings from Alfred L. Hawk, Jr.’s residence and approximately five golden eagle tails, 22 golden eagle wings, and assorted feathers from golden eagles and bald eagles from William R. Wahsise’s residence.

Alfred L. Hawk, Jr. pleaded guilty to three felony charges and one misdemeanor, while William R. Wahsise pleaded guilty to one felony and one misdemeanor.

James A. McDevitt, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Washington, said, “The indiscriminate slaughter of these protected birds is alarming. The black market sale of eagle parts must be stopped at its source.”

“The criminal actions of these defendants defile respectful Native American religious and cultural observances and I hope the community will come together in condemning their behavior,” said Paul Chang, Special Agent in Charge of Law Enforcement for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Pacific Region. “There are legal ways to obtain eagle feathers and parts and we are committed to helping tribal members acquire them through these methods.”

Eagles and other protected migratory birds are viewed as sacred in many Native American cultures, and the feathers of the birds are central to religious and spiritual Native American customs. By law, enrolled members of federally-recognized Native American tribes are entitled to obtain permits to possess eagle parts for religious purposes but federal law strictly prohibits selling eagle parts under any circumstances. The Fish and Wildlife Service operates the National Eagle Repository, which collects eagles that die naturally or by accident, to supply enrolled members of federally recognized tribes with eagle parts for religious use. The Service has worked to increase the number of salvaged eagles sent to the Repository and make it easier to send birds to the facility by providing shipping materials at no charge. The Repository obtains eagles from state and federal agencies as well as zoos.

The penalty for a first time violation of the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act is up to one year in prison and a \$250,000 fine, and the second or subsequent conviction is up to two years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. The penalty for conspiring to take and sell bald and golden eagle parts is up to five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

This investigation was conducted by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, with the assistance of state and tribal wildlife authorities. This case is being prosecuted by Tim Ohms, Assistant U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Washington.

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